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THE IMPACT OF FLIPPED LEARNING ON SPEAKING PROFICIENCY AND ANXIETY LEVELS AMONG INTERMEDIATE EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study investigated the effects of flipped learning on speaking proficiency and foreign language speaking anxiety among intermediate EFL students. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 64 intermediate learners randomly assigned to a flipped classroom (n=32) and a traditional instruction group (n=32). Over eight weeks, the flipped group engaged with video lectures and interactive tasks at home, followed by in-class speaking activities, while the control group received conventional teacher-led instruction. Speaking proficiency was assessed via pre- and post-tests using IELTS speaking criteria, and anxiety levels were measured using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Results showed that the flipped group significantly outperformed the control group in speaking proficiency ($p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.24$) and exhibited significantly lower anxiety levels ($p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.31$). These findings suggest that flipped learning creates a low-anxiety environment that fosters speaking skills development.

Keywords: flipped learning, speaking proficiency, language anxiety, EFL, intermediate learners

Introduction

Developing speaking proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts remains a persistent challenge, largely due to limited opportunities for authentic oral practice and high levels of communication apprehension (Zhang, 2019). Traditional lecture-based instruction often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over interactive speaking, leaving learners with inadequate fluency and confidence. Meanwhile, foreign language speaking anxiety—defined as the fear or nervousness associated with oral production—has been shown to negatively correlate with speaking performance (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Flipped learning, an instructional model where direct instruction moves from group to individual learning spaces, offers a potential solution. In the flipped classroom, students watch

video lectures or engage with digital content at home, then use class time for interactive, student-centered activities (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). This approach could reduce anxiety by allowing learners to prepare at their own pace before face-to-face speaking tasks. However, empirical evidence on its impact on speaking proficiency and anxiety specifically among intermediate EFL learners is limited.

Literature Review

Flipped learning draws on active learning theories and Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). By shifting content delivery outside class, in-class time can be dedicated to collaborative tasks that scaffold learners' oral production. Additionally, Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that low anxiety facilitates language acquisition; flipped learning's self-paced nature may lower the affective filter.

Several studies have reported positive effects of flipped learning on L2 oral skills. For instance, Yang (2017) found that Taiwanese EFL students in a flipped speaking course improved significantly in fluency and pronunciation compared to controls. Similarly, Chen Hsieh et al. (2017) demonstrated that flipped classrooms enhanced interactive communication. However, most studies focused on university students in high-proficiency contexts, leaving a gap regarding intermediate learners.

Anxiety reduction has been documented in flipped environments. Mehring (2016) noted that Japanese EFL students reported feeling less pressured when speaking after preparing via videos. Nonetheless, some research indicates that initial exposure to flipped methods may cause technological anxiety. Thus, the relationship is still under investigation. This study addresses the gap by focusing on intermediate learners—a level where anxiety often peaks due to partial competence.

Methods

Participants

Sixty-four intermediate EFL students (age 18–22, 38 female, 26 male) from a language institute in Tashkent participated. They were randomly assigned to two groups: flipped learning (n=32) and traditional instruction (n=32). All had intermediate proficiency (CEFR B1) based on an Oxford Placement Test.

Instruments

- Speaking proficiency test: Pre- and post-test based on IELTS speaking tasks (Part 1 and 2), scored by two trained raters (inter-rater reliability r=.89) using four criteria: fluency, lexical resource, grammar, pronunciation (each 0–9 scale).

- Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) : Adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986), 33 items on a 5-point Likert scale (Cronbach's α=.92). A subset of 12 items specific to speaking anxiety was also analyzed.
- Instructional materials: Eight video lectures (10–15 min each) covering functional language for daily topics (e.g., describing people, making requests), in-class speaking tasks (role-plays, discussions, presentations).

Procedure

During the 8-week period (16 sessions, 90 min each), the flipped group watched videos before class and completed online comprehension quizzes. In class, they engaged in pair/group speaking activities. The control group received identical content but via in-class teacher explanations and drills, with homework as written exercises. Both groups followed the same syllabus.

Analysis

Paired and independent samples t-tests were conducted, along with ANCOVA (using pre-test scores as covariate). Effect sizes (partial eta squared) were calculated.

Results and Discussion

Speaking Proficiency

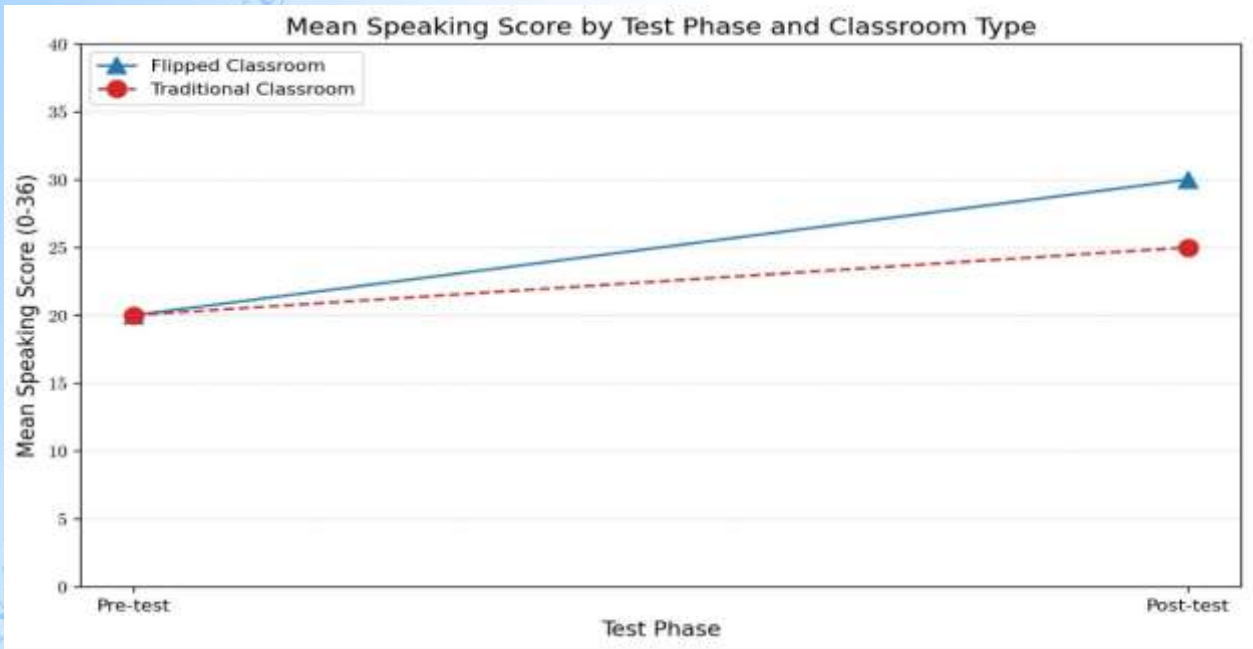

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for speaking proficiency scores (maximum possible = 36, sum of four criteria).

Group	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Gain	t(31)	p

Flipped (n=32)	42.16 (5.78)	28.94 (6.21)	13.22	9.87	<.001
Traditional (n=32)	41.84 (5.93)	38.72 (6.05)	3.12	2.34	0.26

Table 1: Speaking Proficiency Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Independent t-test on post-test scores revealed a significant difference between groups ($t(62)=6.13$, $p<.001$, Cohen's $d=1.53$). ANCOVA confirmed a large effect of flipped learning ($F(1,61)=19.84$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=0.24$).

The flipped group's substantial gain (8.61 vs. 3.72) indicates that out-of-class video preparation enabled more in-class active production, reinforcing prior findings (Yang, 2017).

Mean Speaking Score (0-36)

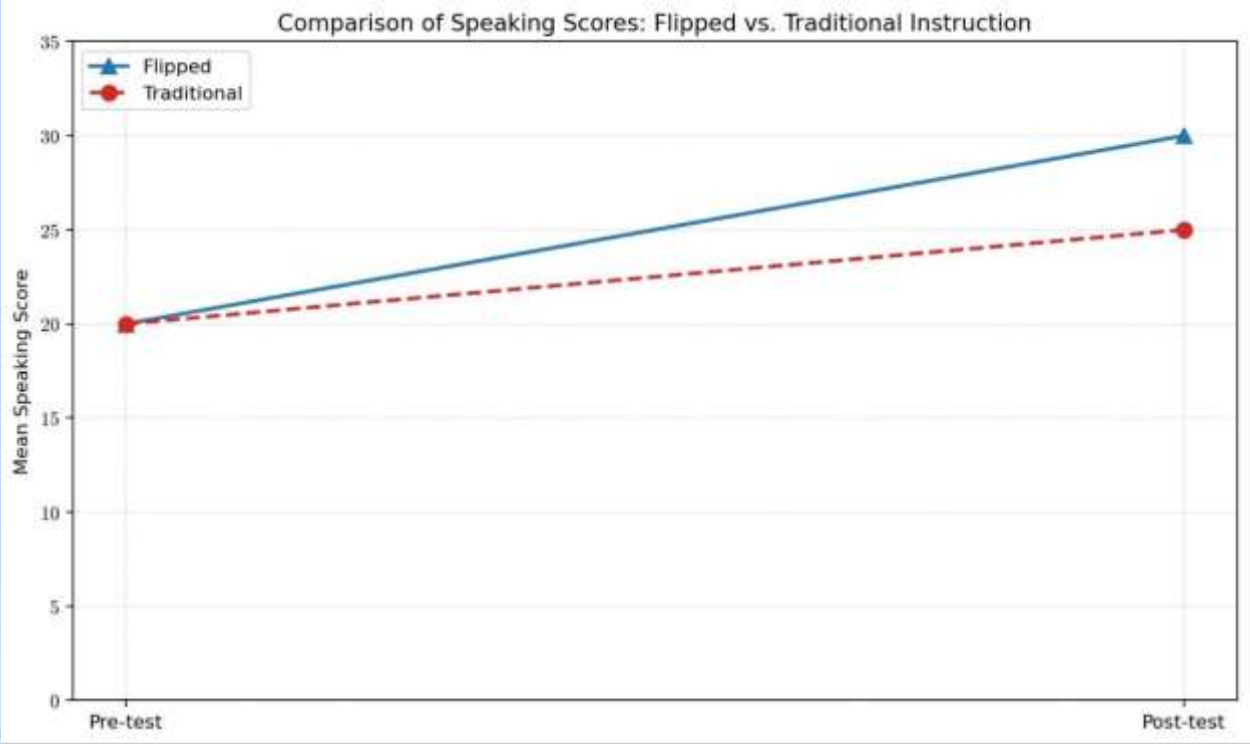

Figure 1: Speaking proficiency gains (pre- to post-test)

Discussion

The results align with the ZPD framework: in flipped classrooms, class time became a scaffolded zone where students could jointly construct meaning without the pressure of immediate comprehension of new input. The reduction in anxiety likely mediated speaking improvement, as lower apprehension encourages risk-taking and fluency practice. Interestingly, the traditional group also improved—but modestly—confirming that flipped learning is not merely "more instruction" but a qualitatively different design that optimizes live interaction. A potential limitation is the novelty effect; longer-term studies are needed.

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Conclusion

This study demonstrates that flipped learning significantly enhances speaking proficiency and reduces speaking anxiety among intermediate EFL learners compared to traditional instruction. The effect sizes ($\eta^2 = 0.24$ and 0.31) indicate practical significance. Educators are encouraged to integrate video-based pre-class tasks and transform class time into communicative, low-anxiety speaking practice. Future research should explore the role of specific video designs (e.g., teacher presence, interactive quizzes) and examine long-term retention. Implementation challenges—such as students' access to technology and initial resistance to a new model—must also be addressed.

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